Unequal youth migrations: exploring the synchrony between social ageing and social mobility among post-crisis European migrants

Abstract

This article explores how symbolic boundaries between youth and adulthood shape experiences of upward and downward social mobility among EU migrants. Drawing on 56 biographical interviews with Italians who moved to England after the 2008 economic crisis, and focusing on three individual case studies, the article reveals that normative understandings of adulthood emerge as a central concern from participants' biographical accounts, and that they mobilise unequal forms of cultural, economic and social capital to maintain a feeling of 'synch' between social ageing and social mobility. Drawing on Bourdieu and the sociology of adulthood, the article proposes the notion of synchrony to explore how tensions in the relationship between social ageing and social mobility shape experiences of migration. This allows for an innovative theoretical bridge between cultural class analysis, adulthood studies and migration studies, and for a better understanding of how intersections of class and age shape intra-European migrations.

Keywords: class, migration, youth, adulthood, social mobility, intra-European migration, Bourdieu, Italy, economic crisis, symbolic boundaries

Dr Simone Varriale

School of Social and Political Sciences

University of Lincoln

Brayford Pool, Lincoln, LN6 7TS, UK

svarriale@lincoln.ac.uk

Introduction: Situating post-crisis EU migration at the intersection of class and age

Since the 2008 economic crisis, a growing body of scholarship has started exploring the reactivation of South-to-North migrations within Europe, particularly from South European countries like Italy, Spain and Greece. This literature has focused predominantly on graduates and high-skilled professionals (Dubucs et al., 2016; King et al., 2016; Triandafyllidou and Gropas, 2014) and, in line with previous work on intra-EU migration, has highlighted the importance of professional and educational opportunities, but also self-discovery and adventure, in these privileged migrations (Favell, 2008). However, it has been argued that these migrants, despite their relative privilege, feel unable to achieve 'grounded lives' in their home countries (Bygnes and Erdal, 2016), namely forms of professional, economic and residential stability that enable a sense of emotional security in the present and future (Dubucs et al., 2016). As these insecurities emerge as a central motive for emigration, this literature problematises earlier conceptions of West European migrations as equally privileged and 'unproblematic' (Lafleur and Mescoli, 2018: 481) – conceptions which are further complicated by Brexit and by the post-crisis migrations of black and ethnic minority Europeans (Barwick, 2018). Nonetheless, work on post-crisis EU migrants and intra-European migration more generally remains disconnected from debates about social inequalities and, especially, from class analysis (Bonizzoni, 2017). Unequal trajectories of social mobility among European migrants remain underresearched, and the migrations of less privileged West- and South-EU citizens are rarely addressed (Lafleur and Mescoli, 2018).

This article brings to this literature a focus on class inequalities and how they intersect with processes of social ageing, particularly with participants' understandings of approaching adulthood. Drawing on 56 biographical interviews with Italians who moved to the West Midlands and London after 2008, and focusing on the biographies of three migrants with different amounts of cultural, economic and social capital, the article explores how symbolic boundaries (Lamont and Molnár, 2002) between youth and adulthood shape participants' experiences of upward and downward social mobility in Italy and (later) in the UK. Theoretically, the article proposes the notion of

synchrony, or 'synch', to explore emotional tensions between movement in social space (Bourdieu, 1984) and movement in social time (Buchmann, 1989), and how these tensions shape the experience of migration. The article contributes both to the study of intra-EU migration and to broader debates about the experience of social mobility, which have gained prominence in class analysis, but which ignore both migration as a theoretically productive case study, and social time as a relevant structure shaping trajectories and experiences of social mobility.

Social ageing and the experience of social mobility: bridging cultural class analysis and the sociology of adulthood

Since the early 2000s, sociologists have become increasingly interested in the cultural dimension of class inequalities. Drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, a literature known as cultural class analysis has challenged understandings of class based solely on economic privilege, revealing how social capital and cultural capital – in its institutionalised form (qualifications) and embodied form (tastes and tacit knowledge) – contribute to differences in class position and practices of social distinction (Atkinson, 2013; Ingram, 2011; Skeggs, 2004).

Cultural class analysis has recently started paying attention to the lived experience of social mobility, challenging a more established, quantitative focus on rates of intergenerational mobility (Goldthorpe, 1996), which ignores social mobility's subjective dimension (Bertaux and Thompson, 1997). In this literature, Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus and field have been used to understand experiences of upward mobility among people with working-class and, to a lesser extent, migrant backgrounds. These studies show that early socialisation into working-class backgrounds can leave an 'emotional imprint' on paths of upward mobility, as it creates embodied dispositions which need to be negotiated in social fields, such as elite professions (Friedman, 2016) and higher education (Ingram, 2011), that are dominated by middle-class norms. Moreover, working-class dispositions can be stigmatised in such fields, especially for upwardly mobile women and ethnic minorities (Lawler, 1999; Wallace, 2016). As recently stressed by Erel and Ryan (2018:

4-5), 'first-generation' migrants remain largely marginal to this literature, and while there is growing research on migrants' habitus and capitals in migration studies (Ryan et al., 2015), this work is not concerned with the experience of social mobility per se.

The lifecourse is an implicit analytical focus in Bourdieusian studies of social mobility, especially given the centrality, in some contributions, of biographical interviewing techniques (Erel, 2010; Friedman, 2016). These contributions focus on what Bourdieu calls *social trajectories* (1984: 109-112), namely how groups and individuals accumulate or lose different forms of capital across their lifecourse. More importantly, they zoom into the subjective dimension of individual trajectories, revealing tensions and ambivalences generated by the experience of moving into unfamiliar social fields. Despite this focus on the temporal and biographical dimensions of mobility, this work tends to ignore age as a *normative concern* for social actors, and indeed has not discussed how age-based distinctions between youth, adulthood and older life shape the experience of social mobility.

This question has become increasingly relevant with the rise of less predictable and more precarious 'transitions' into adulthood experienced by young people born after the 1970s (Buchmann, 1989; Coté and Bynner, 2008) and, more recently, affected by the post-2008 economic crisis (Woodman and Wyn, 2015). A key argument of this debate – which has taken place in youth studies and in the emerging sociology of adulthood (King, 2012) – is that post-war expectations of 'linear' transitions from school to work and, for the middle classes, from university to work no longer reflect the experiences of young people, and that adulthood – as a social representation tied to expectations of economic, professional and residential autonomy – has been redefined by structural changes such as more insecure employment opportunities and the restructuring of national welfare (Blatterer, 2007; Woodman and Wyn, 2015). More specifically, while it has been argued that the reality of youth transitions is less predictable than during the post-war years, how these transitions are *experienced* by young people themselves remains a matter of debate. Following the 'individualisation thesis' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), several authors have argued that in the absence of economic, residential and relational stability, young adults have developed more individualised understandings

of adulthood, which draw on notions of psychological maturity rather than on socio-economic markers (Coté and Bynner, 2008). Some scholars suggest that this new script of 'psychological adulthood' is replacing the 'old' one based on socio-economic markers (Mary, 2014; Robertson et al., 2018b). However, others stress young people's enduring concern for security and stability, arguing that they have interiorised a neoliberal ideology of individual responsibility for their successful or 'failed' transitions into adulthood (Allen, 2016; Silva, 2012). Indeed considerable evidence suggests that the post-war ideal of adulthood retains significant symbolic power despite more uncertain transitions (Blatterer, 2007; Cuzzocrea and Magaraggia, 2013; Woodman and Wyn, 2015: 83-85). Similarly, in the Italian context, while stable employment and economic autonomy have become more difficult to secure (Cuzzocrea and Magaraggia, 2013), these markers of adulthood remain a powerful ideal among young people (Pitti, 2017), as this paper further demonstrates.

This debate about changing youth transitions and adulthood's normative dimension raises an important but so far neglected question for the study of social mobility: how do normative concerns about social ageing shape experiences of upward and downward social mobility? This is also a pressing question for the subject of this article. Post-crisis EU migration has been associated with a desire for professional, residential and relational stability among both South and East European migrants (Marcu, 2017; King et al., 2016; Triandafyllidou and Gropas, 2014). It has also been argued that EU migrants in their thirties and forties are particularly concerned with securing 'grounded lives' (Bygnes and Erdal, 2016) compared to younger migrants, who display a more individualist ethos (Moroşanu et al., 2018). However, these contributions do not explore inequalities among migrants of the same ethno-national group and how these shape the experience of approaching adulthood. Similarly, while highlighting the importance of normative age distinctions, the sociology of adulthood tends to focus on inter-generational rather than intra-generational inequalities (Blatterer, 2007; Coté and Bynner, 2008). Other scholars have recently drawn on Bourdieu to highlight the enduring relevance of intra-generational inequalities (France

and Roberts, 2017): while non-linear and insecure transitions affect young people who belong to the same 'social generation' (Woodman and Wyn, 2015), these uncertainties are experienced in different ways by those with different class backgrounds (Allen, 2016).

This paper combines a Bourdieusian focus on social mobility – defined as individuals and groups' accumulation or loss of different capitals during their lifecourse (1984: 109-112) – with an analysis of how migrants draw distinctions between youth and adulthood. To conceptualise such distinctions, I draw on Buchmann's work on adulthood as a 'narrative script' endowed with expectations of progression in both social time and social space (1989: 15). Since the post-war years, progression in social time has become tied to the expectation of 'a sequential order of positions and roles' (16) in the fields of education, work and family. The fact that this expectation has become increasingly unlikely, as discussed above, means that what Bourdieu (1984) calls *objective* social trajectories – i.e. upward and downward mobility in the social space – are not necessarily aligned with this narrative script. However, the script still exerts significant influence among social actors (Allen, 2016; Blatterer, 2007; Pitti, 2017), thus shaping subjective experiences of social and geographical mobility. I am particularly interested in the *synchrony* and lack thereof (*asynchrony*) between these subjective expectations and objective social trajectories. Buchmann's focus on adulthood as a narrative script allows for a productive theoretical bridge with cultural class analysis, especially Lamont and Molnár's concept of symbolic boundaries, which they define as 'conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorise objects, people, practices, and *even time and space* [my emphasis]' (2002: 168). Symbolic boundaries are indeed based on narrative scripts which can be socially, nationally and/or transnationally shared (Lamont and Molnár, 2002: 171).

In the remainder of this article, I explore how tensions between a historically-specific 'script of life' (Buchmann, 1989) and unequal social trajectories shape the experience of migration. To be sure, the notion of synchrony captures a process, rather than fixed positions in social space and time. Inequalities of cultural, economic and social capital can make people feel 'in' and 'out' of synch at different moments of their lifecourse, especially if they lack the resources to access more durable

forms of economic and residential autonomy. Synchrony and asynchrony thus refer to the social process of match/mismatch between one's trajectory in social space and in social time. It is especially the experience of mismatch (asynchrony) that leads actors to (re)evaluate their past, present and future[1] trajectory (Atkinson, 2011), as I discuss in this article's empirical section. Synchrony and asynchrony should not be confused with 'synchronicity', a concept which in lifecourse theory is used to indicate the 'linearity' of transitions from youth to adulthood (Elder, 1998). As discussed above, such linearity is increasingly unlikely. However, it still informs subjective aspirations of social and geographical mobility.

Both Italy and the UK have been affected by forms of neoliberal restructuring which predate the 2008 crisis, but which have intensified since then (Allen, 2016; Spagnuolo and Stasi, 2016). However, it is well documented that Italian and other EU migrants still understand the UK as a more 'meritocratic' country compared to South and East Europe, regardless of how recent policies have transformed its labour market and welfare (Bygnes and Erdal, 2016). This makes Italian migration to the UK an important case study to explore how migrants negotiate aspirations for traditional markers of adulthood with a neoliberal script that frames realising such aspirations as an individual responsibility (Silva, 2012). Recent research suggests that Italian migrants see these two narrative scripts as intimately linked: in the UK (the land of 'meritocracy'), individual effort is expected to be rewarded with access to traditional socio-economic markers of adulthood, which in Italy remain beyond reach (King et al., 2016). However, how these aspirations are realised through unequal social trajectories remains scantly researched.

Methodology

This article draws on 56 biographical interviews conducted with Italian migrants living in the West Midlands and the Greater London area. The next section provides an in-depth analysis of three case studies. I focus on these cases because they throw into sharp relief two themes which are widespread within the sample: participants' reference to the post-war script of adulthood, and the

equally widespread use of a script of individual self-resilience (which I discuss especially in my third case study: Enzo). These cases also highlight the importance of inter-generational support for migrants in different social positions, which was explicitly discussed by a third of participants. Furthermore, focusing on individual case studies allows me to provide a multilayered analysis of the following processes: 1) how participants draw age-based distinctions; 2) how they do so to evaluate different moments of their social and migrant trajectory; 3) how they mobilise their resources to maintain or recover synchrony between social ageing and social trajectory. I follow other scholars working on social mobility and migration (Bertaux and Thompson, 1997; Erel, 2010) who have used detailed biographical accounts to analyse how social and cultural structures impact upon individual trajectories, thus generating new theoretical insights.

The choice of case studies also reflects the theoretical principles behind the construction of my larger sample. As the literature on post-crisis EU migrants focuses mostly on high-skilled professionals (see Introduction), I was interested in interviewing Italians who arrived in the UK with different kinds and amounts of capital, including Italians without degrees, with vocational high school diplomas and with compulsory education. Italian emigration to the UK was a suitable case study for this, as the existing literature estimates that graduates represent about a third of this emigration flow (Bonizzoni, 2017; Tintori and Romei, 2017), making it significantly diverse. In this article, I thus focus on three participants who occupied different 'positions' (Bourdieu, 1984) in the Italian social space: they moved to the UK with a BA in nursing (Elena), a vocational high school diploma (Renato) and three years of vocational high school (Enzo). Their families' social positions reveal that these educational paths are classed (Table 1). Indeed, high school choice is socially stratified in Italy, with vocational high school tracks (as opposed to 'academic' tracks) being more likely among children of families with lower economic and cultural capital (Romito, 2018). The participants' biographies also reveal intersections of inequality that reflect broader trends within the sample: the case of Elena reveals the gendered[2] impact of the economic crisis on the public sector in Italy, while Renato's biography includes migration from South to North Italy, thus revealing the

influence of enduring regional inequalities. Participants moved to the UK when they were 22 (Enzo), 24 (Elena) and 28 (Renato). At the time of the interview they had spent between a year and a half and six years in the UK. Like other participants, they were recruited through messages posted on Facebook groups dedicated to Italians living in the West Midlands and London, and through further snowball sampling.

Table 1 here

I started the interviews with an open question about motivations for moving abroad and let participants develop their own narrative, probing for examples and details when needed. However, to situate participants' migrant trajectory into their *social trajectory* (Bourdieu, 1984), I also asked questions about their life before migration, which produced detailed narratives about their educational and professional trajectories. At the end of the interviews, I also asked participants about their parents' qualifications and employment (if these had not emerged during the interview). The three interviews discussed below lasted about two hours each, which is also the average length of the other interviews. I conducted the interviews in Italian and translated excerpts for this article. Names and identifying details have been changed to protect participants' anonymity. The project obtained ethical approval before fieldwork started.

As the research's preliminary aim was an analysis of unequal social trajectories, I did not ask questions about age. However, distinctions between adulthood and youth were mobilised by my participants, who described in great detail their desire for traditional markers of adulthood (especially in terms of professional and residential stability) and evaluated their social trajectories in terms of synchrony and asynchrony between their age and social position. While participants' use of age distinctions is a product of the interview encounter (King, 2012), participants themselves stressed that these distinctions played a role in their motivations for migration and in how they evaluate experiences of work and housing in Italy and the UK. Work and housing, as I discuss

below, are the main social fields (Bourdieu, 1986) in relation to which participants discussed their understandings of youth and adulthood.

The notion of synchrony inductively emerged while analysing interview transcripts with NVivo. Following Erel's biographical approach (2010), my analysis focused on how participants mobilised unequal economic, cultural and social resources during their social and migrant trajectory. However, I realised that participants in different social positions made similar references to their thirties as an age when they hoped (or had hoped) to reach economic and residential autonomy. The thirties thus emerged as a narrative script shared by participants in unequal social positions, and I started thinking in terms of synchrony and asynchrony between this narrative script and participants' social trajectories.

I conducted the interviews when I was in my early 30s, an age which was shared (and frequently recognised) by about half of participants. This arguably facilitated discussions about the importance of securing economic and residential stability by 'our' thirties. Proximity in social time, however, was complicated by differences of ethnicity, gender and class. Having a Southern Italian background certainly made it easier to establish rapport with other Southern participants (e.g. Renato). Being male, by contrast, might have prevented some female participants from explicitly discussing their concerns about family formation (see also note 2). Finally, many respondents assumed that I was a 'student', but some of them became quite surprised (and possibly intimidated) when discovered that I was a 'paid' member of staff at a UK University (albeit on a temporary contract). Overall, while these differences were certainly important, I feel that they did not prevent participants from discussing their concerns about synchrony.

Conceptualising synchrony: intersections of class, age and migration

Elena

When I met Elena, she was 26 and had been working as a nurse in the West Midlands for two years. From the start of our conversation, she mobilised a specific understanding of adulthood to explain the fears that had motivated her relocation from Rome (her hometown) to the UK.

> At the moment there's no way of finding a job in Italy that doesn't involve being self-employed. So they won't pay you for sick leave, they won't pay your holidays, they won't refund your expenses. You'll earn more, but you'll have to pay your taxes, and for this reason your income becomes pitiful, you can't buy a house, and you end up living with your mum and dad until you're 30-35.

Like other participants, Elena located adulthood and its material markers (buying a house, becoming economically autonomous) between the early and mid-thirties, thus drawing symbolic boundaries based on the traditional script of adulthood. She explained in great detail why nursing, in Italy, is no longer a public sector job which guarantees *timely access* to this social position. She mentioned the economic and residential insecurities of self-employed positions, which are temporary, affected by higher taxation and do not provide the social benefits of permanent positions. She linked temporary self-employment to a broader transformation in nursing as a professional field, one exacerbated by spending cuts to public health (Spagnuolo and Stasi, 2016).

> Remember permanent contracts? They're gone […] Public exams [the only way to access permanent positions in public hospitals] have been rare for the last 10, 15 years. There has been no turnover among staff, the old nurses are still working and their retirement age has been extended, so they keep working and there are no new positions. To reduce the number of nurses further they [the public administration] […] close down hospitals or merge them. So they hire you [as a self-employed nurse] for six or eight months to cover maternity leave or severe illnesses. But it can be six months in Rome,

> then in Milan, then … Every six months you put your life on the line and start again. I wasn't ready for this.

Elena's narrative resembles the stories of other participants, mostly women, whose educational trajectory should have led to a public sector position, for instance as a nurse or a teacher, but who struggled to access such a position because of similar structural reforms. As Elena fears a path of downward mobility – compared to her parents' access to permanent positions after high school – maintaining 'synch' becomes a strong concern.

She stressed two related problematics during the interview. First, she linked progression in social time to an expectation of progression in social space (Buchmann, 1989): she made clear that living with her 'mum and dad until [she was] 30-35' would be emotionally troubling and, implicitly, socially stigmatised, as she alluded to the stereotype of 30- and 40-year-olds still living with their parents ('mummy's boys' or *mammoni*, Blatterer, 2007: 777). Second, her professional aspirations are markedly classed. She made clear that, as a 'graduate', she would never work as a 'waitress' in the UK. Before moving to the UK, she worked as an 'assistant' in a travel agency for six months, but she stressed that 'it wasn't the thing for which I studied'. Elena's concern for maintaining synchrony is thus based on a strong distinction between graduate and lower-status jobs. At the same time, nursing in Italy can no longer fulfil the aspirations of economic stability and symbolic respectability inscribed in her educational and, to some extent, family habitus (her father had worked in the public sector all his life). This mismatch between habitus and professional field creates anxieties about both her future (Atkinson, 2013) and the *timing* of her social trajectory.

She presented migration as a remedy to this risk. To secure synchrony between temporal and social mobility, she registered with the UK Nursing and Midwifery Council and made an application for a hospital that is close to her grandparents' house (her mum has British parents). She stayed with her grandparents for the first few months, so that she could avoid shared housing and rent an apartment once she had received her first wages.

The 2008 economic crisis featured very little in her narrative, despite having affected her professional field (Spagnuolo and Stasi, 2016). Like other South European migrants (Bygnes and Erdal, 2016), she connected the restructuring of nursing to a deeper moral crisis affecting social and political institutions in Italy, especially in the form of corruption and nepotism. However, as I explore further below, this narrative of 'national' malaise – which is tied to an understanding of the UK as a more 'meritocratic' country – obscures both inequalities among post-2008 migrants and how they intersect with normative expectations about social ageing.

Such expectations also informed Elena's considerations about relocating to Italy. During the interview she presented her work as proof that in the UK things work in a more meritocratic way: she had a permanent contract, could secure an apartment for herself and her partner, and had opportunities to progress in her career. However, she also reported that she and her partner were feeling homesick and that they were having difficulties in creating meaningful relationships with her colleagues. As a result, after two years they were considering moving back to Italy. She called it their 'evil plan': the idea was to keep her job in the UK while buying property in Italy, so that they could ultimately move back to Italy and live in her partner's 'second home' while renting out the new property to secure a 'proper' income. This plan was based on significant family privilege: her partner's parents had a second home. When I asked why they could not just relocate to this 'second home', her anxieties about maintaining synchrony re-emerged powerfully and she again drew symbolic boundaries between adulthood and youth.

> I don't want to go back home and then, after three months, we move back to our parents' houses because we need to rent out [her partner's second home] to make money. It has to be definitive, I don't want to go back [to Italy] and lose. […] I don't want someone asking me, 'What time are you coming home?' […] I don't want to ask my mum and dad for money to go out. I have completely removed these things, they are no longer part of me. I've moved forward, I'm 26 and have my own house and

> economic life; I would feel out of place, even though I lived there [at her parents' house] for 24 years. Two years out change everything.

The risk of 'going back' both in social time (living again with her parents) and in social space (losing the residential and economic autonomy she'd gained in the UK) made the prospect of relocating to Italy without buying additional property troubling. As she stressed, it would have meant feeling 'out of place', both in social space and in social time.

Renato

Renato moved from a small Southern Italian town to London in 2011, when he was 28. When we met, he had spent six years working as a self-employed tiler. Like Elena, he linked his motivations for moving abroad to a growing feeling of asynchrony between his age and social position in Italy. However, for him this experience had lasted longer, as in Italy he had worked as a tiler for nine years (since finishing high school). He did the same job as his father but struggled to find work on a regular basis.

> There was work for one week but no work for the following one, then two weeks of work and one without work. I mean, you couldn't make any plans. When you had more work you had to save money for the week without work, because you couldn't ask your mum for money at 30. I mean, it's bad, isn't it? So there was my uncle […] he had been living in London for 30-35 years, and he does the same job I do.

Renato felt that his age was increasingly out of synch with his social position, as nearing 30 he still struggled with being economically autonomous from his parents and 'couldn't make any plans'. However, when he was 19 the relatively low pay was not a problem, as it was experienced as a first taste of economic autonomy.

> I started working with the brother of a friend; he was a tiler and I learned from him. I always worked with him, he gave me 30-35 euros per day […] It was good money for a boy of 18-19, it wasn't too bad. You stayed in your hometown, you lived at home with your mum cooking and everything. Then I started working … I went to Perugia to work for a company [i.e. he moved from South to North Italy] […], but they paid poorly too … In Italy they always pay poorly, you see? It's not worth working there.

An income that looked 'not too bad' when he was socially young (18-19) became inadequate as he approached his thirties. Renato links this problem to 'Italy', alluding to a narrative of national malaise that is widespread among Italian migrants (King et al., 2016) and which they do not necessarily link to the 2008 economic crisis (like Elena, Renato did not mention it). However, as anticipated above, this narrative obscures important inequalities in social and migrant trajectories and how these feed into the experience of approaching adulthood. While Renato, like Elena, presents his migration as motivated by a tension between social ageing and social mobility, his migrant trajectory is influenced by less economic capital (in the forms of property and income) and by a less 'convertible' form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), namely his nine-year experience as a tiler, which was not institutionally recognised across the UK, like Elena's BA, but needed the validation of local connections to be turned into capital.

As Renato explained, after six years working as a tiler in London, he was 'tired' again and wanted to change profession. Despite being a self-employed worker, his earning capacity depended on his uncle, who was the person 'passing jobs on' and who paid him 'the minimum'. Leaving his uncle would have meant losing a network of established clients. Moreover, he did not have enough money to buy the equipment to start his own business. Initially, moving to London had meant discovering a new degree of economic autonomy: he could leave his parents' house and had enough money to 'follow a few whims', such as travelling across Europe. However, this new economic autonomy was not enough to secure autonomous residency in London, which he could not leave easily

because of his uncle's 'jobs'. After six years in shared accommodation, he felt again that his lifestyle (and, implicitly, his social position) was out of synchrony with his age.

> I am tired of living like this, it's not … You get home, you want to cook and there are two other people in the kitchen, so you have to wait and … How can you fucking do it? […] It's a life you can do at 20-25, until 30. After that it kills your morale, you can't keep doing it, especially if you know it's going to be your life forever.

Renato's biography shows that inequalities of cultural, economic and social capital can make experiences of synchrony more transient and precarious. While moving to the UK, for Elena, meant experiencing a 'homesickness' that she had not envisaged as a problem, she was still able to access independent housing and to recover the professional path that she felt was appropriate for her education. She was thus able to access traditional markers of adulthood which she struggled to access in Italy and to recover a sense of alignment between her educational habitus and her professional trajectory. By contrast, Renato found himself in a situation of professional dependency on his uncle (and, as a result, on London's rental market) which kept him in shared housing for a long time. After six years, this brought back old anxieties about being in a position that was not appropriate for his age.

Enzo

The biographies of Elena and Renato show a strong desire for traditional markers of adulthood, particularly in the contexts of work and housing. However, as participants in this study also mobilise a script of individual resilience and responsibility, to what extent is this script tied to a new, more 'psychological' definition of adulthood?

Enzo moved to Birmingham at the age of 22 and had spent a year and a half working as a bartender. In contrast to Elena and Renato, he did not connect his motivations for moving abroad to a feeling

of asynchrony between his age and social position. In Italy he lived with his mum and earned between 500 and 700 euros per month making coffee in a bar in his hometown (located in Central Italy). He said several times that he left his 'little town' because 'the mentality is still closed', and because he wanted to feel like a 'citizen of the world'. This was not uncommon among my younger participants, who saw their relocation not necessarily (or only) as an escape from downward mobility, but as a form of self-discovery and exploration. While this idea has been ascribed to highly educated young migrants (Favell, 2008), I have found that it is also common among young respondents, like Enzo, with relatively little education and family resources (Table 1). However, this narrative does not exclude more economic considerations (see further below), and, in contrast to Elena and Renato, Enzo explicitly links his motivations to the 2008 economic crisis. He said that the crisis had reduced the number of clients in the bar where he worked and had created a mood of 'resentment' among the people he knew, which contributed to his decision to move abroad. Among young respondents working in the catering sector, Enzo was not unusual in mobilising a strong individualist ethos. He emphasised his self-resilience several times during the interview, stressing that to remain in the UK one needs to be 'determined' and 'convinced in what you're doing'. He also underlined his strength of character as a way of distinguishing himself from other Italians, who 'give up' because they are discouraged by linguistic barriers or by the catering sector's long working hours.

> [In England] you can live just on tips. […] You can earn £30-40 in tips [per day], even £100 on Saturdays, so with three Saturdays you are able to pay rent. But a lot of people give up, they say, 'No. I prefer washing dishes in an Italian restaurant.'

Despite living in a shared house and earning just over £1,000 per month (depending on tips), Enzo presents his move abroad as a stepping stone towards 'maturity' and 'security' in himself.

> [In England] I've managed to pay rent, pay bills, have the fridge full, go out for dinner, buy a £150 pair of shoes […] [T]hese are treats I was confident I could afford, I wasn't being irresponsible. […] This made me much more secure about myself, because on top of being here alone, taking care of myself and everything, I wake up in the morning and say, 'Let's go to work, I have money.'

Like Renato when he was in his late teens, Enzo is not looking for the stability associated with the traditional markers of adulthood (buying a house and being able to rent non-shared accommodation). However, economic gains remain clearly important to his narrative about becoming more 'responsible' and 'mature'. Moreover, later in the interview he revealed that his individualist and hard-working attitude is tied to a normative understanding of youth and its temporal boundaries.

> Of course, you can't work as a barman for the rest of your life. I mean, it's bad to get to 50 and have to work with young boys behind the bar, it's really … You can be as good as you want, but it's not … you can't do it all your life. […] Maybe around my forties to fifties I could take a job in a factory, a working-class life which guarantees you're working until your sixties, then you get your pension and bye bye. For now I'm doing this [barman], but I know that in my future … Or maybe I could open a bar, why not? But until I get to 30, nothing stops me.

As anticipated above, an emphasis on individual effort and responsibility is not uncommon among younger Italian migrants (see also Moroşanu et al., 2018), and I found that this is particularly strong among those working in the catering sector, who link their claims of self-resilience to their capacity for sustaining long, partly unpredictable working hours. However, these distinctions between resilient and 'lazier' migrants do not rule out a powerful post-war narrative about adulthood, and hence the 'thirties' as a symbolic boundary. Enzo makes very clear that he is taking advantage of this normative distinction, as 'nothing stops' him from taking his chances until he reaches his thirties. Moreover, while he links his individual efforts to an idea of 'maturity', I argue that it is

problematic to see this as a new, more psychological script of adulthood (Coté and Bynner, 2008). At least in this study, Enzo and other participants suggest that individual 'maturity' does not have the same legitimacy of socio-economic markers of adulthood. Indeed, as recently showed by Moroșanu and colleagues (2018), purely psychological claims of adulthood risk going unrecognised by peers and relatives in Italy. Overall, Enzo's biography shows that individual resilience, as a narrative script, remains tied to normative distinctions between youth and adulthood. Self-resilience is not an end in itself, but rather it represents a means: an emotional resource to achieve socio-economic stability. My findings also suggest that this might become a problematic strategy for migrants with less convertible resources, who need time to produce new forms of capital (Erel, 2010). Like Renato, Enzo might become tired of shared houses and low pay in the next few years, which could lead to a feeling of asynchrony between his age and social position. He already thinks that being a bartender becomes less respectable (and more physically exhausting) once one becomes an 'adult'.

Conclusions

This article has explored how tensions between social ageing and social mobility shape trajectories and experiences of migration, and hence how symbolic boundaries between youth and adulthood frame the meaning of upward and downward social mobility among EU migrants. I have proposed the notion of synchrony to capture how inequalities of cultural, economic and social capital affect migrants' experience of approaching adulthood, and how they mobilise unequal resources to maintain a feeling of 'synch' between age and social position. Focusing on post-2008 Italian migrants, I have showed that post-war markers of adulthood (namely professional and residential stability and economic autonomy from one's family) remain a powerful ideal among participants with different social trajectories, and that while their ideas about 'proper' employment and education are classed, they share a similar understanding of the 'proper timing' for achieving adulthood. As a result, while a neoliberal script of individual resilience can be mobilised to claim

distinction and closeness to the UK's 'meritocratic' culture, this narrative script remains tied to a normative understanding of youth and its temporal boundaries. Self-resilience appears as an emotional resource to achieve a highly desired socio-economic stability, rather than as a new script of adulthood based on psychological criteria. For this reason, less resourceful migrants might find themselves 'in' and 'out' of synch at different moments of their social trajectory, as they might struggle to secure durable forms of economic, residential and professional autonomy.

Focusing on the synchrony between social ageing and social mobility, this article provides a strong contribution to the study of intra-European migration, which remains largely disconnected from debates about social inequality and, more specifically, from class analysis. The article also provides an innovative contribution to the study of social mobility in cultural class analysis, which has paid little attention to social time as a structure which shapes experiences of mobility and to first-generation migrants as a theoretically productive case study. The article has raised broader questions about how social ageing intersects with upward and downward mobility. This is key for expanding our understanding of social mobility's lived experience, as while cultural class analysis has paid some attention to how classed trajectories intersect with gender and race, it has largely ignored age and age-based symbolic boundaries. I have showed that the latter depend on historically-specific scripts of the lifecourse which feed into social actors' evaluation of their past, present and future trajectory. This is an important dimension of social mobility's lived experience, as inequalities of different capitals shape individuals' and groups' ability to access the emotional and symbolic rewards of being 'in synch' with normative lifecourse narratives. This question is also relevant for the study of other age-based distinctions (e.g. between adulthood and older life), as these might be equally relevant in understanding contemporary experiences of social and geographical mobility.

Proposing the notion of synchrony, the article provides a valuable theoretical bridge between migration studies, cultural class analysis and the sociology of adulthood. Such bridging opens up several areas for future research, some of which pertain to the limitations of this article. Focusing

on individual biographies allowed me to explore how age distinctions informed participants' evaluation of their social trajectory at different moments of their lifecourse, both in Italy and (later) in England. However, only re-interviewing participants at a later date can reveal the extent to which their attachment to a post-war script of adulthood will change during or after their thirties, and how inequalities of resources will affect this process. A second limitation pertains to the sample's theoretical nature: I focused on individual case studies that reflect broader trends within the sample of 56 participants, but this sample remains suitable for generating new theoretical ideas, not for statistical generalisation about Italian emigrants living in England or elsewhere. Furthermore, future work will need to pay more attention to intersections of gender and race, which remain unexplored by this article. Race and racism are especially relevant for black and ethnic minority Europeans, whose trajectories remain underresearched (Barwick, 2018). Future research will also need to explore how synchrony and asynchrony shape youth migrations outside Europe (Robertson et al. 2018a).

Notes

1. A growing literature has explored how young people imagine their future vis-à-vis growing socio-economic insecurities (for a recent review, see Woodman and Leccardi, 2015). A discussion of this literature is beyond this paper's scope. However, Kawashima (2018: 659-660) has recently argued that this literature rarely explores how perceptions of the future are shaped by participants' past social trajectory and present social position.

2. As I discuss through the case of Elena, gender inequalities have a strong bearing on respondents' professional trajectories. However, while expectations around family formation are notoriously gendered (Kawashima, 2018), only a minority of participants discussed this issue. These were women who already had children, while female participants without children (usually in their 20s) were more inclined to discuss their professional aspirations. This applies more generally to non-economic markers of adulthood: family formation was explicitly discussed by some older

participants who were well in their 30s or 40s, but rarely by younger participants (see Moroșanu et al., 2018 for similar findings).

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Hila Zaban and Laurie Hanquinet for their constructive feedback and four anonymous reviewers for their helpful and insightful comments.

Funding

This research was made possible by an Early Career Fellowship awarded by the Leverhulme Trust (2015-18).

References

Allen, K (2016) Top girls navigating austere times: Interrogating youth transitions since the 'crisis'. *Journal of Youth Studies* 19(6): 805-820.

Atkinson, W (2013) Class habitus and perception of the future: recession, employment insecurity and temporality. *British Journal of Sociology* 64(4): 643-661.

Barwick, C (2018) Transnationalism and intra-European mobility among Europe's second generation. *Global Networks* 18(4): 608-624.

Beck, U and Beck-Gernsheim, E (2002) *Individualisation*. London: Sage.

Bertaux, D and Thompson, P (eds) (1997) *Pathways to Social Class*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Blatterer, H (2007) Contemporary adulthood: Reconceptualizing an uncontested category. *Current Sociology* 55(6): 771-792.

Bonizzoni, P (2017). Challenging the social reproduction crisis: young Italian middle-class families in London. *Journal of Family Studies* 24: 25-40.

Bourdieu, P (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*: Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, P (1986). The forms of capital. In: Richardson, JG (ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York: Greenwood, 241-258.

Buchmann, M (1989) *The Script of Life in Modern Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bygnes, S and Erdal, MB (2016) Liquid migration, grounded lives: considerations about future mobility and settlement among Polish and Spanish migrants in Norway. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 43(1): 102-118.

Coté, J and Bynner, JM (2008) Changes in the transition to adulthood in the UK and Canada: the role of structure and agency in emerging adulthood. *Journal of Youth Studies* 11(3): 251-268.

Cuzzocrea, V and Magaraggia, S (2013) Blurred transitions: revisiting the importance of work and parenthood for young adults in Italy. In: Nicolas, A, Flaherty, I (eds) *Growing Up and Growing Old*. Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press: 63-87.

Dubucs, H, Pfirsch, T, Schmoll, C (2016) Talking about my generation: emigration and a 'sense of generation' among highly skilled young Italians in Paris. In: Murray, L, Robertson, S (eds) *Intergenerational Mobilities*. London: Routledge, 78-90.

Elder, G (1998) The life course as developmental theory. *Child Development* 69(1): 1-12.

Erel, U (2010) Migrating cultural capital: Bourdieu in migration studies. *Sociology* 44(4): 642-660.

Erel, U and Ryan L (2018) Migrant capitals: Proposing a multi-level spatio-temporal analytical framework. *Sociology*: 1-18.

Favell, A (2008) *Eurostars and Eurocities*. Oxford: Blackwell.

France, A and Roberts, S (2017) *Youth and Social Class*. Houndmills: Palgrave.

Friedman, S (2016) Habitus clivé and the emotional imprint of social mobility. *The Sociological Review* 64(1): 129-147.

Goldthorpe, JH (1996) Class analysis and the reorientation of class theory. *British Journal of Sociology* 47(3): 481-505.

Ingram, N (2011) Within school and beyond the gate: the complexities of being educationally successful and working class. *Sociology* 45(2): 287-302.

Kawashima, K (2018) Longer-term consequences of 'youth' migration: Japanese temporary migrants in China and the life course. *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 39(6): 648-672

King, A (2012) Recognising adulthood? Young adults' accomplishment of their age identities. *Sociology* 47(1): 109-125.

King, R, Lulle, A, Conti, F, Mueller, D (2016) Eurocity London: a qualitative comparison of graduate migration from Germany, Italy and Latvia. *Comparative Migration Studies* 4(3): 1-22.

Lafleur, JM and Mescoli, E (2018). Creating undocumented EU migrants through welfare: a conceptualization of undeserving and precarious citizenship. *Sociology* 52(3): 480-496.

Lamont, M and Molnár, V (2002) The study of boundaries in the social sciences. *Annual Review of Sociology* 28: 167-195.

Lawler, S (1999) 'Getting out and getting away': women's narratives of class mobility. *Feminist Review* 63(1): 3-24.

Marcu, S (2017) Tears of time: a Lefebvrian rhythmanalysis approach to explore the mobility experiences of young East Europeans in Spain. *Transactions* 42: 405-416.

Mary, AA (2014) Re-evaluating the concept of adulthood and the framework of transition. *Journal of Youth Studies* 17(3): 415-429.

Moroşanu, L, Bulat, A, Mazzilli, C, King, R (2018) Growing up abroad: Italian and Romanian migrants' partial transitions to adulthood. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2018.1501505

Pitti, I (2017) What does being an adult mean? Comparing young people's and adult's representations of adulthood. *Journal of Youth Studies* 20(9): 1225-1241.

Robertson, S, Cheng, Y, Yeoh, B (2018a). Introduction: Mobile aspirations? Youth im/Mobilities in the Asia-Pacific. *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 39(6): 613-625.

Robertson, S, Harris, A, Baldassar, L (2018b) Mobile transitions: a conceptual framework for researching a generation on the move. *Journal of Youth Studies* 21(2): 203-2017.

Romito, M (2018) Choosing the right track. Educational decisions and inequalities within the Italian educational system. In: Tarabini, A, Ingram, N (eds) *Educational Choices, Aspirations and Transitions in Europe*. London: Routledge.

Ryan, L, Erel, U, D'Angelo, A, (eds) (2015) *Migrant Capital: Networks, Identities and Strategies*. Houndmills: Palgrave.

Silva, JM (2012) Constructing adulthood in an age of uncertainty. *American Sociological Review* 77(4): 505–522.

Skeggs, B (2004) *Class, Self, Culture*. London: Routledge.

Spagnuolo, S and Stasi, S (2016) La crisi del settore sanitario: la voce degli infermieri. *Sociologia del lavoro* 142: 80-97.

Tintori, G and Romei, V (2017) Emigration from Italy after the crisis: the shortcomings of the brain drain narrative. In: Lafleur, JM, Stanek, M (eds) *South-North Migration of EU Citizens in Times of Crisis*. Basel: Springer, 49-74.

Triandafyllidou, A and Gropas, R (2014) 'Voting with their feet': Highly skilled emigrants from Southern Europe. *American Behavioral Scientist* 58(12): 1614–1633.

Wallace, D (2016) Reading 'race' in Bourdieu? Examining black cultural capital among Black Caribbean youth in South London. *Sociology* 51(5): 907–923.

Woodman, D and Leccardi, C (2015) Time and space in youth studies. In: Wyn, J, Cahill, H (eds) *Handbook of Children and Youth Studies*. Basel: Springer, 703-722.

Woodman, D and Wyn, J (2015) *Youth and Generation: Rethinking Change and Inequality in the Lives of Young People*. London: Sage.

Author's biography

Simone Varriale is Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Lincoln, UK. Previously he was Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at the University of Warwick. He has published extensively on social class, culture and global dynamics in journals such as *Poetics*, *Cultural Sociology* and *American Behavioral Scientist*, and in the book *Globalization, Music and Cultures of Distinction* (Palgrave Macmillan). He has recently co-edited (with Noa Lavie) a Special Issue of the journal *Poetics* titled *Global Tastes: The Transnational Spread of non-Anglo-American Culture* (in press).

Table 1 – Summary of Case Studies

	Employment	Education	Family Background	Gender	Region and City of Birth	Age of Migration	Time in UK
Elena	**Italy** Worked for six months in a travel agency after graduation **West Midlands** Registered nurse	BA in nursing Academic high school track	**Father's Occupation** Marriage officiant (public sector employee) **Father's Education** Academic high school track; some years of university **Mother's Occupation** Hotel receptionist **Mother's Education** Vocational high school (hospitality and catering)	Female	Rome (Central Italy)	24	2 years
Renato	**Italy** Tiler **London** Tiler (self-employed)	Vocational high school diploma (5 years)	**Father's Occupation** Tiler (owned a small grocery store for some time, but went out of business) **Father's Education** Middle school **Mother's Occupation** Florist **Mother's Education** Middle school	Male	Small town* in Campania (South Italy)	28	6 years
Enzo	**Italy** Barista **West Midlands** Bartender (zero-hour contract)	Compulsory high school (3 years)	**Single-Parent Family** **Mother's Occupation** Primary school teacher **Mother's Education** Vocational high school (teacher training school)	Male	Small town* in Lazio (Central Italy)	22	1 year, 4 months
* Names are concealed to secure anonymity							